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## Editor

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**Title:** Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy [*Bagh Paharer Yudhha Joi: China Opera*]

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*Selim Al Din, a dramatist of Bangladesh wrote “Bagh Paharer Yudhha Joi: China Opera” (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy) at the very beginning of his career as a playwright. It remained unpublished though it was written around 1975. Mowla Brothers, Dhaka, Bangladesh first published this article in Selim Al Din Rachana Samagra (Vol. 1) in July, 2005 in Bengali.*

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## **Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy**

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Now-a-days the concept that paintings and theatre can quite easily influence the mind of the mass is not at all fangled newly in China. Yet neither for paintings nor for operas only—pre-revolutionary Chinese emperors imposed restrictions on every popular media. They feared that if all these popular educational Medias went beyond their control then the common mass would be displeased with the ruling class. The dominant class was quite aware of the fact that a major portion of the theatrical artists were penniless. It was always an issue of controversy that whether displaying of murder, sexuality in the western theatre, movies and television would promote criminal propensities in the society but for the Red Communist Chinese people it was never a topic of controversy.

Though there were hints of similarities between the ancient and present traditions of paintings and theatre in China but that didn't mean ancient and present artistic views were no



ways different. The present artistic views are different from the revolutionary notions in the context that the present government encourages everyone to participate considering from the denominational point of view of theatre to be the audience, actor, director and even to critique.

The entire concept of Chinese theatre opera, regarding literature and art, was consolidated on the notion emerged during Mao Tse Tung's lecture delivered in Yenan of Shaanxi in the year 1942. Chinese communists became victorious in the battle against Japanese. They engaged themselves to define and to figure out the clear objectives of art even in the midst of enormous national crisis.

Mao Tse Tung raised a question in his lecture that art and literature were primarily for whom. He answered that literature and art was for majority. Through this he wanted to signify that 90% of the entire population in China are labour class, peasants, soldiers and petty bourgeoisie and finally art and literature did not reach the doors of the poor people.

No doubt the concept was revolutionary. As even today the study of literature is for the ten out of hundred elite class people and those ten considers that plays, operas and poetries of the common mass are substandard, vulgar and of bad taste. The crux of Mao's lecture was to neglect those ten instead of neglecting the other ninety. As Mao said,

Now a-days culture succeeds for the concepts like every literature and art is representing a particular class and art for art's sake from a particular political perspective. It can be said for instance that there are no artistic work which does not represent any class or they are free from any political influences.



Education for Mao was the notch of a wheel of the entire revolutionary machine. If there was no existence of literature, either enormously or even slightly, in our lives it was impossible to take the revolution forward or to win.

On the basis of this meticulous concept, cultural affairs, in 1949 post revolutionary China, had flourished. Though for years people associated to cultural fields had elucidated the concept in their own different way. Till mid sixties many people doubted the validity of Mao's dogma of Chinese traditional opera. Earlier operas, which were popular and yet neglected, were spotted as artistic creation of the mass with massive applause and encouragement. In no time these operas were elevated to a perch with enormous stimulation.

Although in this process of elevation the leaders of cultural affairs had changed the vulgar sections of many conventional traditional opera and given a new significance on the background of revolution and struggle to the popular operas. New concepts were imbibed in the conventional operas. One of the major instances of deconstructing the conventional ideas was boy or girl's choice of selecting their respective bride or groom was prioritised instead of their parent's selection.

"Women Benerals of the Yung Family" was one of the renowned traditional opera of that time. The opera company named 'Fourth Chinese Peking' had brought this to the theatre. This troupe was established in 1959. Young graduate actor actresses were the founder of this company. They adapted an old story as a theme of this opera.

The bloody war between the Chinese and the northern aggressor was the theme of this opera. The Yung family had helped in this war selflessly for a long time. The opera began



with the news of one of the warrior's death of the family. Meu Guing was the wife of the death warrior. This brave lady had taken an oath to war against the overseas oppression till her death on the martyr death of her husband. But in the mean time, the Chinese emperor had succumbed to the pressure imposed by the invader and avowed to give them special benefits.

The brave widow Meu Guing had changed the emperor's decision in secret. She led the Chinese force and succeeded to trace the enemy soldier's camps and defeated them.

This opera was progressive for couple of reasons. First of all, there was the love for one's country and secondly, a woman played the protagonist and was given the equal position to man as a warrior.

Once, the position of women was at the bottom of the social system. Communists attempt to awake the neglected women. In this issue this opera was successful no doubt.

But during mid 60s, there happened to be a dissent among the political leaders regarding the adaptation of traditional stories into operas. It was said that, during this period Mao had commented that cultural ministry had failed to apply down to earth provisions properly. The relationship didn't grow up between this cultural promptness and soldiers or labour class peasants. These operas were not relevant to revolution and restoration.

Mao's idea of new forms, deconstructing the old forms and formats, was that as a consequence the minds of the mass would incline towards feudalism and an anti-revolutionary power would come into existence. Mao believed that in a socialist country people did not like to see kings, ministers, warriors or glamorous women, instead they would prefer looking the replicas of themselves in the plays and operas.



Operas written on contemporary lives had appeared on stage in the first National Opera Festival in 1964 that was based on this perception of Mao. Now onwards revolutionary operas gradually evolved and showcased drastically. Few models of this kind of cultural revolutionary operas were constructed which were performed between 1965 and 1969.

“Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy” was an example of same kind. It was written based on the civil war between the communists and the nationalists. After taking the possession of Tiger Mountain, the nationalists had instated their tyrannical government over there. Peoples Liberation Army had entered there. Tsu Yung, the leader of this group, went to the enemy castle of Tiger Mountain in disguise. The war started in time. Communist and commons had fought together and at last they won the battle. It was an experimental play no doubt but it was performed well and acting was so good that it inspired and motivated the audience. Though few believed that it could have been better if the play was little shorter. In spite of continuous war and provocative scenes, there were even some really beautiful scenes. In one of the sections communist soldiers had taken shelter in a poor hunter and his daughter’s house. For their own security the daughter of the hunter disguised as a dumb boy. This character was portrayed truly in a splendid way.

Model plays were different from classical plays not only in their themes but also in their costumes, acting, music – in every aspect. Costumes were more realistic here. Grandiose, artificial costumes of old days had been discarded in this new form of operas. Even though sometimes acting was influenced by the older forms. For example in the play “Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy”, when Tsu Yung was travelling through the woods, he had a red tailed red whip in his hand instead of the actual horses. This was quite alike a



strategy used in earlier forms of play. Chinese audience had a sharp sense of imagination.

War strategies used in the Model plays were ditto similar to earlier stage operas. War scenes in the stages of China were executed like a duel.

Background music in the newer forms of play in the stages of Peking had also evolved. Mood had changed in comparison to the classical opera music. The change that could be noticed in the recent stages of Peking opera was the change in rhythm and tune. Western as well as indigenous music instruments were used alongside on the stage. Chinese musicians believed that a knightly atmosphere could be created only through western instruments.

There could be seen a huge participation as well as active response of the common mass in the cultural field in the recent days. Innumerable audience were not only watching the plays but they were also participating in the discussion and criticism. These theatre groups performed mainly in distant rural areas. Their main purpose was to widen the thoughts and consciousness of the common people. The editor of People's Daily surveyed and said in an interview that only the number of the actors of this kind were around 10 millions.

Not only in the schools, colleges and universities even every commune had their own theatre groups. This is the diminutive description of theatre culture in China. Many can discard these theatre efforts saying that these are monotonous and propagandised. But the critics even cannot deny the mass participation and the process of educating the commons through these plays. They are bound to praise it.